

gratitude

In Jacob's death-bed blessings we find that he charged one of his sons, Judah, with the leadership of the future nation of Israel. וְיָהוּדָה אֵלֶיךָ יָבוֹא, "the sceptre shall not depart from Judah", says Jacob as he places the mantle of royalty on the shoulders of his noble son. But Jacob's gift of dominion is not unadorned, unlimited ^{or} ~~and~~ unreasoned. The leadership of Judah was to be of a very specific type, and it was deserved by Judah for a very special reason.

The type of Jewish leader which Jacob foresaw in his son Judah was not an autocrat, imposed from above. He was not a benevolent despot, whose despotism survives his benevolence. He was not a philosopher-king, such as was envisioned by the Greek philosophers, for ~~they~~ ^{he} he rules in a high-handed fashion, according to pre-established prejudices. ~~They~~ ^{He} serve principles and prejudices, not people; (~~they are~~ ^{he is} resented, unloved, despised.) The type of Jewish leader prescribed by Jacob in this week's portion was not a democrat, in the sense of being elected by an electorate. Frequently, the democratic ruler really represents only a minority; (he many times is awarded his high office by the passive and apathetic attitude of the lazy masses.) Machine-politics can deceive, and the people can all too often be fooled.

Rather, the archetype of Jewish leader which the Bible presents to us this week, is what we would today call the "grass-roots" man. (He is more efficient than the autocrat, more devoted to his ideals than the philosopher-king, more benevolent than the benevolent despot, and more democratic than the democrat.) He is a man who is so loved for his character, so respected for his personality, and so admired and appreciated for his service that he earns the undying gratitude of his fellows. He is their leader by virtue of their gratefulness to him. Jacob prefaced his charge to Judah concerning his mission of leadership with four important words: וְיָהוּדָה אֵלֶיךָ יָבוֹא, "Judah, your brothers will be grateful to you".

This element of the gratitude of his brothers, which was the source and sanction of his authority, was not granted to Judah as a gratuitous gift. It was given to him as a reward, for he first had to deserve it. וְכַתּוּב אֵלֶיךָ יָבוֹא, tell us our Rabbis of the Talmud. "As one acts to others, so do others act to him."

The attitude you take towards your brothers is the attitude they will take towards you. It is the moral equivalent of what is known in Physics as the Law of the Conservation of Energy. Moral input equals moral output. You cannot expect to receive from others more than you give to others. Show your brothers that you are capable of forgiving, and they will forgive you. Show your neighbors that you are able to understand ^{them} ~~him~~, and ^{they} ~~he~~ will try to understand you. Show your friends that you have the capacity for profound and sincere gratitude, and they will be grateful to you when it is required of them.

Yet, curiously, the biography of Judah does not, upon cursory examination, show any outstanding accomplishments which should make him deserving of his brothers' gratitude. On the contrary, we find him accused by the Bible of moral weakness in his dealings with his daughter-in-law Tamar. And the Rabbis severely castigate Judah for his behavior towards Joseph when he suggested selling him into slavery. Where then are these qualities of the soul which led his father Jacob to bless him with the words יְהוֹנָדָה אֱלֹהֵי יוֹסֵף יִתְּנֵה לָּךְ, "Judah, your brothers will be grateful to you"? To what noble achievements can we attribute Judah's gift?

Our Rabbis of the Midrash suggest an answer to that question when they elaborate upon Jacob's pronouncement and state: אָמַר יְהוָה אֶל־הַדּוֹזָן זֶמְלָה תִּהְיֶה, יוֹסֵף אֱלֹהֵיךְ. "Said Jacob to Judah, 'My son, you sincerely confessed your sin in your affair with Tamar, let your brothers be grateful to you by making you their king'". How cleverly our Sages understood human nature! You see, we must at once decide upon the exact implications and consequences of that word "Gratitude". For "יָסִין" means not "they will be thankful to you" but "they will be grateful to you". There is a very real difference between thankfulness and gratitude. Thankfulness is the expression of a sentiment of recognition for a convenience rendered. Gratitude is a sentiment which strikes deep into the soul of he who is grateful. Thankfulness is superficial; gratitude - profound. Thankfulness is lip-service; gratitude - soul-service. Thankfulness is touching; gratitude - stirring. Thankfulness means appreciation for a favor which you yourself could not do immediately but which you could do later; gratitude means recognition of a favor which you could never

accomplish yourself. You are thankful to a person who has supplied you with a three cents stamp when you were in a hurry to mail an important letter. You are grateful to a person who has saved your life.

or dependency

In short, gratitude involves a confession of inadequacy. You have done something for me which I could never attain by myself. I am inadequate; you have ^{fulfilled} ~~completed~~ me. I am lacking, you imperfect, incompetent, deficient, powerless; you have provided me with what I so need and cannot supply by myself. It is a confession which comes from humility. How interesting that the Hebrew expression for "I ^{am grateful} ~~thank~~" - אני תודה - also means "I confess". And similarly, " אני צודק " means both gratitude and confession.

And what a great religious principle lies in this idea! Man cannot ~~express~~ his gratitude to G-d unless he acknowledges his dependency upon G-d. Take, for example, the first words a Jew says upon arising every morning: אני תודה לך, ה' אלהי, שאתה חיים. "I thank You, O great and living G-d, that you have returned to me my soul with great mercy". Great Mercy indeed! For here is the acknowledgement that without G-d there is no life, a confession that Man is not independent, that by himself he is nothing. This is more than thankfulness. This is gratitude. Or take the special blessing which a Jew pronounces when he has been miraculously saved from disaster - ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו, ה' חיים. "Blessed art Thou, O G-d, our G-d, King of the Universe, who has been good to the undeserving". G-d, I confess that I am among the חסרי חסד, the undeserving. I did not merit the good you have done for me. All the more reason, O G-d, for me to offer to you my eternal gratitude. Or (better,) take the פזמון blessing of the שמונה עשרה which we recite three times daily. Part of that blessing is: אני תודה לך, ה' אלהי, שאתה חיים. "we shall thank You and relate our praise of you because of our lives which are in your hands, and our souls which are hidden with you". Here is the epitome of our gratitude to the Ribono Shel Olam: we acknowledge that our lives are in his hands, as clay in the hands of the potter, his to shorten or to lengthen, to destroy or create. And if G-d has chosen to be good to us, then his is our praise and gratitude. Without that confession, our prayers are merely a platitudinous and empty "Thank you". With ^{מעל} it, it becomes a קריאת קריאה, a sacrificial offering of gratitude, the offering of the soul.

And if the capacity for gratitude means the ability to confess a personal inadequacy and imperfection, then indeed Judah is the model of the grateful man. For Judah, above all others, knew the secret of confessing imperfection. And it was for this reason that Judah deserved the gratitude of his brothers and, therefore, the privilege of leadership.

אמרי לויאלה הושיא. "Judah, your brothers will be grateful to you". יושיא אמר יוסף אחיך. "My son, you so readily and so sincerely confessed your sin with Tamar; you so unequivocally announced 'she is right and I am wrong'; you were big enough to see how small you were; you proved that you have that material of which gratitude is made; let; therefore, your brothers be forever grateful to you, and let these bonds of gratitude be the source and the sanction of your government and jurisdiction over them". It is not boasting and a lust for power which qualifies the Jewish prince. Rather - humility and the ability to confess a wrong-doing.

* [Judah - what a man he must have been!] You will recall that his birth was accompanied by an expression of gratitude. ואלה אמר פסוקי אלהים, יושיא. "And Leah said, this time will I thank the Lord, and therefore she called him Judah". What an inferiority complex Leah must have borne until she gave birth to Judah. וזו היא ילידה. Her eyes were dull. She was shy and withdrawn. She was an older sister who was overshadowed by a younger sister, and probably the type of girl whose elders predicted she would be barren. Drab, colorless and hopelessly introverted, she got a husband only thru her father's ruse. All her life she played second-fiddle to her sister Rachel who was יפה תואר ויפה אפוא. beautiful, brilliant, dazzling, a girl for whom Leah was no match. And here they find themselves married to the same man, Jacob, who openly loves Rachel more than her timid sister. How painfully Leah must have borne her lot. Silently she prays to G-d to put her in her husband's good graces. And then, when she bears her fourth son, she finds that she has won Jacob's admiration and love. In a society in which fertility is of primary importance, she ^{gained} won her husband's respect and affections. ואלה אמר פסוקי אלהים How grateful I am to you, O G-d, for with the birth of Judah I have that which I could never have received without you - my husband's love. And it is thus that she named the child Judah, and it is thus that he lived.

* And, in fact, the entire biography of Judah, after whom we are known as "Yehudim", reflects this sterling aspect of his character.

My friends, this is the picture of the Jewish leader - nay, of every Jew - which Jacob painted on his deathbed. His canvass was the eternity of Jewish history. His brush was a Divine Blessing, and his media were the elements of gratitude and confession and humility. They were the elements of spiritual personality he had seen in Leah and then ⁱⁿ ~~and~~ their son Judah. They were qualities he was able to foresee in many a great Jew afterwards, not the least of whom was King David, the royal scion of Judah, who so piously confessed to the Prophet Nathan his sin with Bathsheba, and who proceeded to so beautifully and esthetically offer his ecstatic gratitude and praise to G-d Almighty, in his immortal Psalms.

[How one wishes that our contemporary Jewish leaders were humble enough to be grateful to G-d! - humble enough to write in a Declaration of Independence that the State of Israel owes its existence to G-d - and to call Him by His name, rather than substitute a watered-down " ^{niB} ", meaning The Rock, a substitution or compromise which is as silly as it is insulting. And how one wishes that those who are the spiritual leaders of humanity - meaning we Jews - had the moral courage to enter our synagogues in a feeling of reverence and humility and gratitude, rather than as a matter of a three-day-a-year habit to say at long "Thank You" which is as insipid as it is superficial. How one wishes that we Traditional Jews would make our davening soul-service rather than lip-service, stirring rather than only touching.]

Let us resolve to act as Jews, descendants of Judah and Leah, and carry out that noble tradition ^{and holy heritage} of humility and ^{by} that sublime heritage of true gratitude. ~~Let us plant~~ in our souls a grain of gratitude. For we know that there can be no Judaism without those qualities which so characterized our father Judah.